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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the study of holidays presents an opportunity for elementary school teachers to employ a range of social science disciplines and to teach their students the fundamentals of inquiry and critical thinking. The study of holidays from a cross-cultural perspective helps students to understand that peoples of all cultures find ways to celebrate, and that they celebrate for different reasons. Two brief case studies are presented in support of these contentions, and to provide teachers with examples. First, the customs involved with the celebration of Christmas are examined as they have evolved historically and across various cultures. Second, a number of holidays that are celebrated in countries and regions outside the continental United States are surveyed in order to demonstrate the variety of holidays that exist and that the need for peoples to celebrate is universal. A list of 16 books for further reference is included. (DB)

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The Study of Holidays:

Possibilities for Depth and Breadth

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The Study of Holidays: Possibilities for Depth and Breadth

The study of holidays is a perfect opportunity for elementary teachers to bring all of the social science disciplines into focus for young children and to teach them the fundamentals of inquiry and critical thinking. Putting holidays into the context of a worldwide inclination to observe or commemorate a religious, historical, cultural or patriotic event with ceremonies or festivities representative of the background of the participants helps students understand the concept that all peoples of all cultures find ways to celebrate--and they celebrate for different reasons. In this country, as in most others, we tend to have four distinctive types of holidays. There are patriotic holidays like Flag Day and the Fourth of July; holidays that commemorate historical events as with Thanksgiving and Columbus Day; holidays that honor particular people such as Mother's Day or Martin Luther King's Birthday; and religious holidays like Easter. Developing a unit of study involving the linkages between holidays and the rationale for celebration provides the students with opportunities for greater insight (see Figure One).

Traditionally holidays in the elementary schools of the United States are taught during that time of the year in which the event occurs. If a holiday is not a national event which falls during the school year, it generally receives very little attention. Furthermore since all holidays are given the same sort of treatment equally , most approaches have been superficial. While children might enjoy participating in the same sorts of activities year after year, it rarely helps them appreciate the multitude of observances that have become so dear to specific groups of people on particular occasions. Figure Two is designed to provide an overview of significant relationships one might investigate when developing the theme of celebration during an in-depth comparison of Holidays.

Using the geographic themes of movement, location, and region as an organizational framework could help children to look beyond the celebration itself to the historic, patriotic or cultural backgrounds commemorated. Students can visit a world where friendliness and neighborliness among peoples develops because of the observances cherished in common. The consideration of movement will provide a look in depth at the origin of customs that explain why the same holiday is celebrated in different places using different customs while the consideration of location will provide a broad look at unfamiliar observances whose bases in love of country, remembrance of worthy people, and commemoration of special events are easily recognizable.

THE MOVEMENT OF CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS -- A STUDY IN DEPTH

Some groups within this nation have continued to hold closely to original ethnic celebration customs rather than lose their heritage by assimilating into the mainstream. Others have maintained some parts of the original customs of their forbearers, while adopting some from their neighbors. Still more people have simply embraced various strands of celebration and adapted them into what has become so much a part of our national experience. The celebration of Christmas in the United States provides a vivid example of this movement and partial assimilation. One example of movement and adaptation is Rodanthe on the North Carolina Outer Banks which has for years maintained the custom of celebrating Old Christmas on January 5, the date celebrated by the English prior to the adoption of the Gregorian Calendar. However, a major part of this celebration is the arrival of Old Buck, a bull, very similar to traditional legends in Norway.

There are special symbols that we associate with Christmas that have their origins from many places around the world. First, consider the decorations made of evergreens. Evergreens for centuries were considered representative of the blessing of

eternal life. Holly was used by the Romans to decorate various structures and branches were sent as gifts to special friends. In England, the tradition continued. Songs were written that included holly and ivy. The holly was generally used to represent men and vines of ivy, women. Mistletoe, which Virgil referred to as the golden branch, has been given special status for centuries. In England, the Arch-Druid would lead a procession of white robed followers carrying a gold sickle. When the tree containing the mistletoe was selected, the plant was cut so that it fell into white sheets and never touched the ground. The mistletoe was carried on the sheets back to the villages, placed over doorways, and known as the *all-heal*. Customs developed which included giving a kiss of peace and goodwill under the mistletoe. Rosemary is frequently hung for fragrance. Legend records that it was present in the Garden of Gethsemane and later transported to England. Rosemary for remembrance has become a common phrase. Knowing some of this background, children can see the greenery around them as a tie binding them to other places and times.

The yule log is a custom that came to the Western Hemisphere with the English settlers. For years, the fireplace and hearth was the center of family activities. The fire provided both light and heat for household activities especially during the winter. At Christmas, an especially large log was chosen. The gathering of the log became a family affair. Prior to lighting the log, toasts were given for long life and happiness to all in the home. The log which had been decorated with paper flowers and ribbons was then lit. For continuity, a small piece of the log was always saved to light the yule log at the following holiday season symbolizing that the celebration of the holiday will continue to some extent as long as the log burns.

The symbolism of candles carried or placed in windows and other parts of the home comes to us from a variety of places and traditions. It is a neighborly symbol of friendliness and warmth. The Romans used the candle as a way of honoring their gods while Jews had used the candle in their temples from the time of Solomon. The Irish put

a candle in the window at Christmas to welcome the Christ Child and strangers into their homes just as the Spanish put the candle over the door for the same reasons. The Bulgarians carry their candles to the stables on Christmas eve to awaken the animals and help usher in Christmas Day. And young Swedish girls begin the holiday season by wearing candles in a circlet on their hair on St . Lucia Day on December 13.

The giving of presents at a variety of celebrations appears to be a worldwide custom. One tradition begins with Nicholas, a wealthy bishop in Myrna in Asia Minor, who developed the custom of giving money to maidens who had no dowry and as a result could not get married. The saint would make an annual trip around the area dropping money down the chimney. The girls would stretch their stockings under the chimney to catch the money he dropped. The Dutch brought the legend of St. Nicholas to New Netherlands where the English later changed the date of his visit from December 6 to December 25 and his name to Santa Klaus. When Clement Clarke Moore wrote the poem, *A Visit of St Nicholas*, it had such a vivid description of the "jolly old elf' that Thomas Nash was prompted to draw the jolly figure that we today recognize as Santa Claus.

Thus at Christmastide we have an abundant mixture of crechés, poinsettias, Christmas trees, camels, and sleighs. Holidays like Easter, Christmas and New Year's Day have moved from place to place with the movement of the people who enjoyed them and have been adapted depending on elements of their new location. Other holidays which were very tied to characteristics of the region where they originated never reached the United States. The study of celebrations would not be complete without considering the similarities and differences in celebrations around the world

THE LOCATION OF HOLIDAYS AROUND THE WORLD -- A STUDY IN BREADTH

Studying holiday customs in other countries can also be enjoyable, educational, and introduce the concept of regional interdependence. No matter the location or characteristics of place, these holidays also commemorate religious, historical, cultural or patriotic events and can be explored in terms of the food, the customs, the landforms, and the resources of the region. Investigating the countries in which some of these holidays are to be found offers the breadth of a world in which all people enjoy celebrating in their own way in their own time frame. The final part of this article addresses a very few of the many worldwide holidays that are representative of places and regions outside continental United States.

Children's Day in Japan, celebrated on May 5, was originally Boy's Day, a celebration honoring the male children. It was later changed to include the honoring of female children, however males are still the primary focus. The purpose of this celebration is to instill upon children the importance of good citizenship, courage and strength in the face of danger. Festivities include the erection of a bamboo pole in front of the home. The carp (a fish that swims upstream symbolizes strength, courage and determination. These attributes are valued highly in the Japanese culture. On children's Day, both boys and girls visit the Shinto temples where priests wave white steamers over their heads, blessing them and wishing them health and happiness.

In Hawaii, June 11 has been set aside as an annual holiday to magnify the contributions of King Kamehameha. It was this king who united the Hawaiian Island into a single kingdom, a unity that still remains today. This is an occasion of great festivity. The celebration begins at 9:00 a.m. when a memorial ceremony is conducted. singing chants and draping long leis of yellow (plumeria) and vines (maite) on Kamehameha's statue is performed. There is a parade in Honolulu and on one float a handsome Hawaiian is chosen to represent Kamehameha I. This person wears a golden mono-

feather cloak and Grecian styled helmet, replicas of the one once work by the king. A princess is chosen to represent each of the eight major islands. There is music, dancers and horses. the parade ends at Iolani Palace; where Hawaiian monarches once lived. Other festivities include pageants, canoe races and luaus.

Loy Krathong is a holiday in November when the people of Thailand ask forgiveness for having dirtied the rivers and canals throughout the year. Children make cup-like krathongs of various shapes and sizes out of banana leaves fastened with bamboo pins and decorated with flowers. Each is filed with a candle, a coin and an incense stick and floated down the river.

Midsummer Eve on June 23, was celebrated in many European countries for centuries. It was a time of rejoicing. It has been characterized as being a time of fire, water, flowers and young love. In rural European countries, some people danced around bonfires, while others jumped over them to ensure the growth of their crops. Some people even drove their cattle and sheep through the embers to cure and protect their animals from disease. Many young girls tried to envision their future loves throughout the festival. In Scandinavia, Midsummer Eve is still celebrated as a welcome change from the long dark winters that occur there.

Tu Bishvat is a Jewish holiday by origin. It is one of the four Jewish New Years and represents the rebirth of the trees. When this holiday is celebrated in Israel on February 10, the fruits are beginning to bloom and the sap has risen which marks the rebirth of the fruit. After the exile of the Jews from Israel, Tu Bishvat was seen as a day to commemorate the rites of a nation living on its land. During much of Jewish history the observance of the Tu Bishvat holiday involved the eating of fruits associated with Israel such as almonds, dates, figs, pomegranates and carob. When Israel became a state, Tu Bishvat became more significant. On this day there are elaborate tree planting ceremonies held by school children.

The French celebrate their Independence Day on July 14, known as Bastille Day. It commemorates that day in July of 1789 when an armed mob of Parisians stormed the Bastille prison to get arms and incidentally to release prisoners being held for a variety of reasons. This marked the beginning of the end of royal power and the start of national legislatures. Bastille Day is celebrated with speeches and parades much the same as other independence days in countries around the world.

When students begin to perceive the reasons that different celebrations developed as they did, they will have begun the process of comprehending the concept of diversity within unity on which international understanding is based. Teaching strategies springing from the consideration of the similarities and differences of holidays and their customs around the world can be used in extending a broad awareness of cultural heritage to the development of responsible citizenship in younger students. Good citizens need to understand the basis of their own actions and those of people of many different cultures, even when those actions are aimed at consecrating, celebrating, honoring, commemorating or merely observing.

STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE REACH THE GOAL OF UNDERSTANDING WHY PEOPLE CELEBRATE

Categorizing — With the objective of learners being able to organiz pieces of information, have the children use the worldwide holidays described above to create a content mapping similar to the one in Figure One but based on holidays around the world.

Observing and Comparing — With the objective of learners being able to make comparisons between celebrations in different locations, show pictures of different ways of celebrating the same holiday. Have children make compare and contrast statements.

Problem Solving — With the objective of learners being able to describe the feelings associated with lack of cultural understandings, role-play solutions (sociodrama) about children who are invited to a celebration which they do not understand.

Reality Check — With the objective of learners being able to tell of changes in holidays between both regions and time periods, invite a speaker to your class that can tell about the holidays of their youth or country of origin. The students might also interview senior citizens and tape oral histories of celebrations in an earlier time.

Recall Verbal Information — With the objective of learners being able to tell specific information about holidays, their origin and movement, prepare a study guide about holiday celebrations. Have children work in pairs to prepare answers. The students could then make a seek-and-find puzzle with all of the holidays studied or make a set of riddles using holiday descriptions without naming the actual celebration.

Sequencing — With the objective of learners being able to relate holidays to specific times of the year, make a calendar timeline

showing times during the year when holidays around the world are observed. The children could then make flannel board figures, glue sandpaper or felt on the back, and use them to portray stories about holidays through the year using scripts they had written.

Tactile Learning

With the objective of learners being able to use their hands to make illustrations of information about holidays, make flour and water maps showing movement of holiday customs. A variation would be an interactive bulletin board with a world map and colored yarn hanging to match holiday customs to country. Students could also construct dioramas of historical events celebrated by different holidays nationally or worldwide.

Thinking and Creating

With the objective of learners being able to use divergent thinking to create their own learning experiences, have children make Holiday Jeopardy games by creating their own categories and then writing 5 questions for each from easy to harder. The students might also be put in cooperative learning groups to create a new holiday and then plan an unusual holiday celebration of their holiday for the entire class.

Working Cooperatively

With the objective of participating with others in analytical and creative activities, put students in pairs. Give each group one folder which contains pictures and a paragraph of information about a holidays. Each folder be about a different holiday. Give pairs of students two minutes to look at their picture and write down one descriptive word about place and another about movement on their paper. At a signal all pairs pass folders and begin on another holiday. Afterwards pairs of students can use their list of words to write a joint cinquain about holidays.

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CATEGORIZING HOLIDAYS

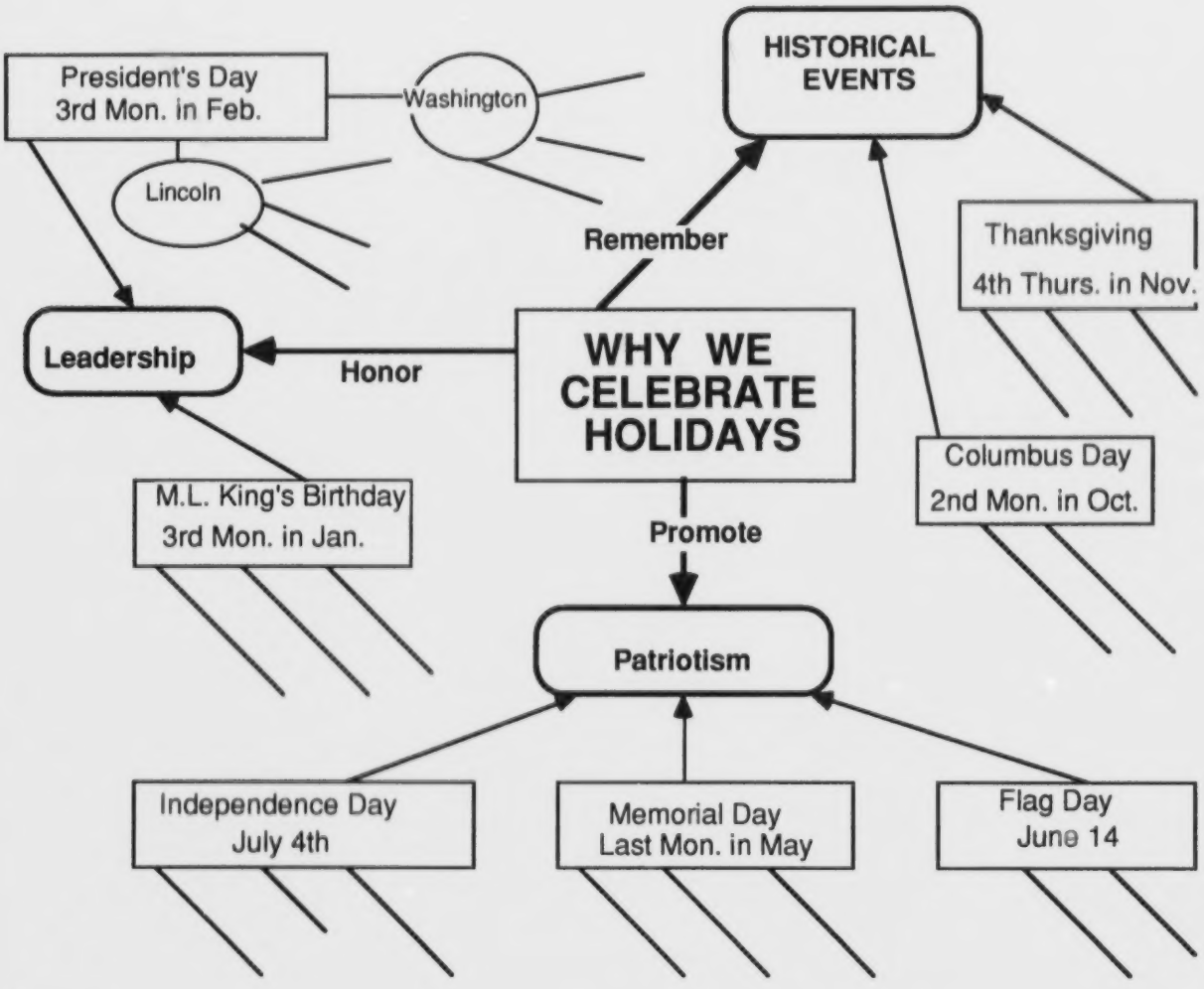
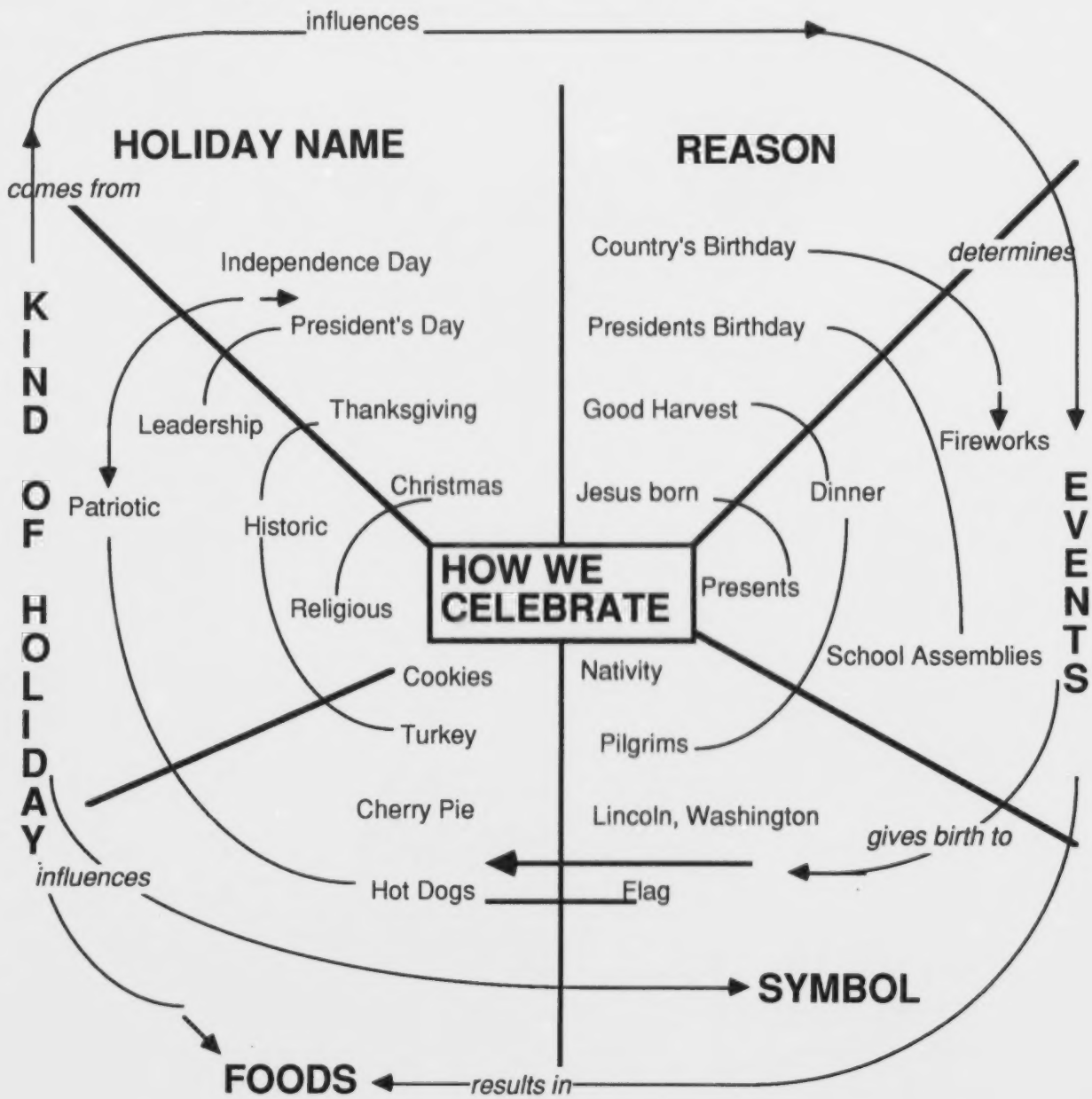


Figure One

UNITED STATES HOLIDAYS



UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS

Figure Two